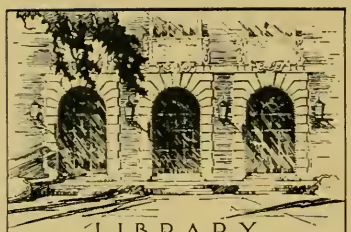

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MEMOIR

OF

EDWARD LORD BISHOP OF SALISBURY.

[PRIVATELY PRINTED FROM THE ANNUAL REGISTER FOR 1854].

1855.

By Robert Phillimore
Chancellor of the Diocese
of Oxford.

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EDWARD LORD BISHOP OF SALISBURY.

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At Salisbury, aged 53, the Right Rev. Edward Denison, D.D., Lord Bishop of Salisbury. Edward Denison, the late Bishop of Salisbury was the second son of John Denison, Esq., of Ossington, in the county of Nottingham, and Charlotte Estwick his wife. The eldest son of this marriage is J. Evelyn Denison, Esq., M.P. for Malton.

Edward, the subject of this brief notice, was born on the 13th of May, 1801; and educated with his eldest brother at a preparatory school then in high repute, under the government of Dr. Moore, at Esher, in Surrey. The two brothers were sent to Eton in 1811, and at this famous school four of the younger brothers of the same family, remarkable for their great proficiency in classical scholarship, were subsequently educated.

Eton was then under the head-mastership of Dr. Keate; but the late Bishop, as well as his brothers, were greatly indebted to the abilities, attainments, and affection of their domestic tutor, the Rev. Charles Drury, Michel Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, who accompanied the two elder brothers to Eton, and remained with them there till their education was completed.

In 1819 Edward Denison entered as a Gentleman Commoner at Oriel College, Oxford, then presided over by the learned and accomplished Copleston, afterwards Bishop of Llandaff, whose discerning eye soon discovered the abilities and excellent qualities of the young undergraduate.

In Easter Term, 1822, Edward Denison's name appeared in the first class of classical honours. In August 1826, he was elected a Fellow of Merton College. His next step was to enter his name in one of the Inns of Court in London, and to begin an assiduous study of the law; after a short period, however, he abandoned his intention of becoming a member of the bar, and betook himself to the study of divinity, and on the 23rd of December, 1827, he was admitted into Holy Orders, and soon afterwards made his first essay in the performance of pastoral duties on becoming incumbent of Wolvercot, a small parish in the neighbourhood of Oxford. This charge he afterwards resigned, and on the 10th of October, 1829, he was inducted into

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the living of Radcliffe, near Nottingham, which he resigned in February, 1833.

After this period till the time of his being consecrated Bishop of Salisbury he resided principally at Merton, discharging the duties of incumbent of St. Peter's in the East, in the city of Oxford.

He was presented to a stall in the Cathedral of Southwell in January, 1834, and in March of the same year he was made one of the Select Preachers of the University.

On the 22nd of January, 1835, he published a pamphlet on the question of the admission of Dissenters into the Universities. In 1836 he published, in concert with others, a compilation of Metrical Psalms and Hymns, adapted to the use of the Church, of which 2000 copies were sold.

In November of the same year he published a volume of Sermons which he had preached before the University, and which obtained considerable celebrity at the time.

On the 16th of April, 1837, at the unusually early age of 36 years, he was consecrated Bishop of Salisbury, and enthroned in the Cathedral of that See, on the 11th of May, 1837.

He married on the 27th of June, 1839, Louisa Ker Seymer, daughter of Henry Seymer, Esq., of Hanford, Dorset, and of Harriet Beckford, sister of the late Lord Rivers, Mrs. Denison was a lady remarkable for great personal beauty, but still more for

the Christian graces of her character, and her entire devotion to the duties of her position. Two children, who have survived both parents, were the issue of this marriage: Edward, born September 9th, 1840; Louisa, born September 7th, 1841. Mrs. Denison survived but a few days the birth of her daughter, and died on the 22nd of September, 1841.

On July 10th, 1845, the Bishop married Clementina Baillie Hamilton, daughter of the Rev. Charles Baillie Hamilton, Archdeacon of Cleveland, and Rector of Middleton, and of Lady Charlotte his wife, daughter of the Earl of Home. By this lady, who still survives her husband. he had no children, but to her the son and daughter of the former marriage were consigned by the Bishop's will.

His death caused a considerable sensation in the country at large; but in the diocese over which he had presided, the love and reverence of the people for their chief pastor manifested itself on the occasion of his unexpected death in a manner almost unprecedented; and yet he had never been remarkable for those qualities which usually attract public admiration—he had invariably shunned publicity, except where the discharge of duty rendered it imperative; not only had he never courted popularity, but his grave, thoughtful, and cautious disposition, his great humility, continually increasing with his years, his unconquerable natural reserve, combined with his ever-

present sense of the responsibilities of his high and holy office to withdraw him as much as possible from the public gaze, and eminently disqualified him for being the favourite of the people.

But there are merits and services which the calm but conscientious discharge of duty does not fail, gradually perhaps, and almost insensibly, to make known and appreciated to those who have lived within the sphere of its performance. More especially does this happen when rare intellectual ability is joined with consummate prudence to make this conscientious performance of duty effectual in the highest degree.

In the truth of this proposition is to be found the reason why, on the 15th of March, 1854, the ancient Cathedral of Sarum was thronged, even to overflowing, with genuine mourners composed of all classes, and of all callings of life, when the remains of their guide, their friend, their protector, their benefactor, were consigned to their resting-place in those cloisters whose holy beauty his private munificence had restored during his life. Everybody then remembered what his seventeen years' episcopate had done for the diocese of Salisbury. Many were able to justify and increase their estimation of the services which he had rendered to the diocese by comparison with results of preceding episcopates. Then it was that men looked back on the past, and observed how silently and imper-

ceptibly ecclesiastical institutions and an ecclesiastical system had grown up amongst and around them —had covered the surface and penetrated into the heart of the diocese. The face of the diocese was changed; visible fabrics of religion had appeared in every spot once neglected in the counties of Wilts and Dorset. Moreover, schools had invariably risen with the church. But still better, the visible forms of the church and school were true types of the invisible agencies which they represented. The Catholic doctrine of the undivided primitive Church, the religious and intellectual training of the child, and still more of the master—the last being the favourite and successful achievement of the late Bishop—manifested their excellent results, in the rapidly-increased education, civilisation, and comfort of the people, and offered indisputable evidence, not only of the piety and sagacity, but of the patient and enduring perseverance of their promoter.

The Bishop in his charge delivered at his second visitation, spoke as follows: "In 42 parishes a second service has been added, where, three years ago, there was but one; in 65 parishes, in the same period, a second sermon has been added; in 89 parishes the sacrament of baptism is now publicly administered, where formerly it was not; and holy communion is now administered more frequently, and the festivals of the Church (strange to say, heretofore almost universally neglected) are now in the way of being,

before long, universally observed." At his next visitation, he remarked: "During the three last years 62 parishes have added a Sunday service, 57 have added a sermon at the afternoon or morning service. In 57 more parishes baptism is publicly administered. In 1839, 143 parishes only had two sermons; in 1851, 295. Monthly communion in 1839, 35; in 1851, 84."

During the episcopate of the last but one of Bishop Denison's predecessors in the See of Sarum, and which extended from 30th of June, 1807, till June, 1827, four churches had been consecrated, three of which had been rebuilt, and one had been new.

During the episcopate which immediately preceded that of Bishop Denison, and which extended from June, 1827, to February, 1837, seven new churches were built and two rebuilt.

Bishop Denison's episcopate lasted from April, 1837, to March, 1854, and during this period, in Wiltshire, 22 new churches were built, and 30 rebuilt from the ground. In Dorsetshire (annexed during Bishop Denison's episcopate, in lieu of Berkshire, to the diocese), 14 new churches were built, eight were rebuilt from the ground, six were enlarged, making a total of 72 churches built, rebuilt, and enlarged, besides about 80 more repaired and restored without being enlarged, in a diocese not thickly inhabited. It was not only, however, the number of the consecrations, but the circumstances

attending them which formed a new era in the episcopate of Sarum.

At each of these consecrations the attendance of clergy as well as laity was very great, and the holy communion was invariably administered, and generally to large numbers of persons.

Sometimes at the close of the affecting service used in the consecration of churchyards, the Bishop would add a few words of grave but affectionate warning to the assembled people, words well calculated to leave an abiding impression upon those who heard them.

With each new church almost invariably sprung up a new school. In the extension and improvement of that material part of the spiritual training of the people, the holy rite of confirmation, the energy and devotion of the late Bishop were most conspicuous. Previously to the episcopate of Bishop Denison, Salisbury had been almost the only place to which the inhabitants of all South Wilts had been compelled to resort for confirmation; and those are yet living who remember the shocking and immoral results of conveying large numbers of both sexes considerable distances, who were often compelled to seek, not only refreshment, but a night's lodging on the road. Moreover, the Bishop's predecessors had held confirmations at uncertain intervals, and at a few particular and favoured places.

Bishop Denison determined to break through this

evil custom; one year he confirmed throughout Wiltshire, another throughout Dorsetshire, on the third he held his visitation. No year passed that he did not confirm in the principal towns of his diocese; nor did his exertions end here—he always endeavoured, utterly regardless of his own convenience, to select such central spots as would bring the church in which the confirmation was holden within a reasonable walk of the candidates for the holy rite, and visited thereby many a small country church to which the presence of a bishop had been formerly unknown.

The spirit, the principles, and the habits which had made him the model of a parish priest at St. Peter's in the East, at Oxford, accompanied his elevation to the episcopate. He was at all times ready to assist his clergy in the performance of divine service. Not only did he frequently preach upon public occasions in different parts of his diocese, and continually in his own cathedral, but once every Sunday in one of the churches of Salisbury, often twice, sometimes, but a short time before his death, three times, though his delicate frame was unfit for exertions which visibly undermined his health.

Every Wednesday found him at the Penitentiary in Salisbury, administering instruction and consolation to the inmates. All these things were silently done, and as a matter of course.

But there was one occasion which forced his

apostolic devotion to his duties into public notice, and, in spite of himself, into general public admiration.

The Bishop was entertaining at his hospitable palace the members of a scientific body, then holding their meeting at Salisbury, when suddenly the terrible plague of the cholera smote the city of Salisbury in all its wrath. The Bishop immediately dismissed his guests, and from that moment until the departure of this appalling pestilence—in every murky street and wretched house, wherever disease was rifest and danger most imminent—there were to be found the consolations of religion, ministered by the chief pastor of the diocese; and strange to say, in spite of the weakness of his constitution, he escaped untouched. It seemed that "Sarum's good Bishop," like his illustrious brother of Marseilles, a century ago—

> "Drew a purer breath
> When nature sickened, and each gale was death!"

The Bishop's career in Parliament was eminently episcopal. He spoke upon almost all questions of a religious character which were discussed in the House of Lords, and upon such questions only (with one exception), and always with so much gravity, wisdom, dignity, and piety, that the opinions of no one on the episcopal bench had greater weight in that illustrious assembly.

The one exception was, a reply which he thought

it due to his sacred office to make to a base slander which appeared anonymously in a newspaper, and which charged him both with having received and retained from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners more money than was his due, and also with malversation of funds entrusted to him. His speech shattered to atoms both charges. One part of it made a deep impression upon the House—it was manifestly the truth itself. "My Lords," he said, "I am conscious of many and grievous faults. I look back upon the long years of my ministry, and see sad shortcomings and painful deficiencies. May a merciful God pardon me for them! But of an avaricious love of money, or of a selfish expenditure of it, my heart and conscience do not accuse me. I believe that the revenues of my See, of whatever amount, being rightfully dedicated to the highest purposes, have not been selfishly diverted from them. I believe that this surplus was, in my hands, made not less instrumental in promoting the cause of true religion, and the ministrations of the Church, than if it had been paid over to the Commissioners. I am sure at least of this, that it has not been either hoarded for myself or my family, or spent for my personal gratification. I have been Bishop of Salisbury for sixteen years, in possession of these revenues, and I can truly assert that I have not from the income of my See saved a single shilling. While at no former period of my life, neither when I lived as a fellow

of a college, nor when I was incumbent of a small benefice in the country, have I found it so impossible, or have I been so little willing, to spend money in the gratification of personal tastes. Were I to die to-morrow, my family would have no other provision than that arising from my and their very small private means, and such moderate addition thereto as I have felt it my duty to make by insurance on my life. My son will inherit only this patrimony; but I hope that I may add, that in spite of calumnies such as these, he will have also that which I trust he will value above hoarded wealth—the inheritance of a father's unblemished name."

It seemed as if he died shortly afterwards to demonstrate the sincerity of this affecting and Christian statement. He left no accumulated funds, nothing but the small fortune of which he had spoken, to his widow and his children; and after his death it was discovered that his charities had amounted in fourteen years to £17,040.

His habits of life were characterised by the greatest simplicity. His knowledge of mineralogy, geology, and generally of natural history, was accurate and profound. His taste for horticulture was very refined—witness the palace garden at Salisbury, which now forms the most beautiful of foregrounds to the cathedral and its precincts. That cathedral he dearly loved, and from it he was rarely, and never willingly, absent for any length of time.

It remains to be noticed, that, when the members of the Church within his diocese determined to erect a fitting monument to the memory of their much-esteemed Bishop, they fixed upon one which they thought worthy of his fame, and which they knew would have been of all others the most acceptable to him.

During his life he had restored, at his own cost, the beautiful cloisters of the cathedral. The chapter house, a building of exquisite architectural beauty, remained unrestored and dilapidated at his death. To restore it to its original beauty of holiness was known to have been an object on which his heart was set. It was determined that his monument should be the restoration, and £5000 was speedily subscribed for the purpose.

The monument was worthy of the man.

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